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ABSTRACT

This handbook was developed to assist student advisory committee members in maximizing the benefits to be gained through the use of Student Advisory Committees (SAC's) under the Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA). The handbook discusses the Emergency School Aid Act which authorizes the program, regulations governing the student advisory committee, procedures for the selection of members, the purpose of the SAC, some ideas on how it might function most effectively, and numerous suggestions on the kinds of activities the SAC might engage in. In addition, appendices are provided on the background of the new legislation, as well as the names and addresses of regional education staff members that may be of assistance. (Author)

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STUDENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE HANDBOOK

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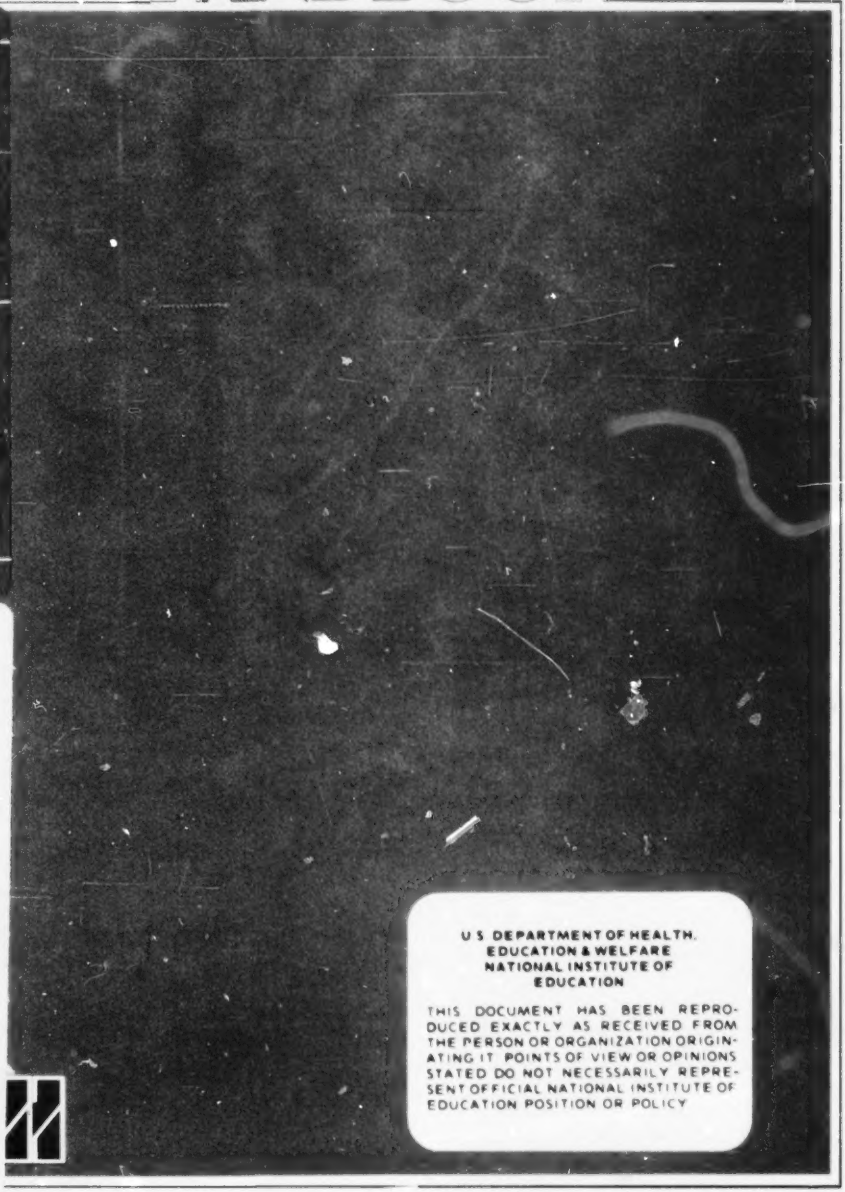

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STUDENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE HANDBOOK

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
David Mathews, *Secretary*
Virginia Y. Trotter, *Assistant Secretary for Education*
Office of Education
T.H. Bell, *Commissioner*

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To Student Advisory Committee Members:

This handbook has been developed to assist you, the student committee members, in maximizing the benefits to be gained through the use of Student Advisory Committees (SAC's) under the Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA).

The handbook discusses the Emergency School Aid Act which authorizes the program, regulations governing the student advisory committee, procedures for the selection of members, the purpose of the SAC, some ideas on how it might function most effectively, and numerous suggestions on the kinds of activities you might like to engage in. In addition, appendixes are provided on the background of the new legislation, and the names and addresses of regional education staff members that may be of assistance to you in your efforts.

Sufficient copies of the handbook will be made available by your local educational agency (LEA) to each committee established within your district. The handbook will also be helpful to faculty members who may serve as advisors to your committee, and to school superintendents and principals whose leadership and support are essential in aiding in the development of responsible and positive roles within the schools.

This handbook has been reviewed by a special panel of students who have served on student advisory committees. In addition, the handbook has been evaluated by local school administrators, students, various youth groups, and Federal officials.

August 1975

INTRODUCTION

Millions of high school students are now pursuing their education in the changing environment of desegregating schools. In some schools the desegregation process has been underway for several years, in others it is a new experience. In almost every case, the continuing desire to improve the quality of education for all students has required that school officials, parents, and other community members work together to solve new and old problems. This cooperative approach works best when students participate actively in this effort because they are the ones most directly affected by the changes within their school environment.

In the summer of 1972, the President signed into law the Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA). This act created a program designed to provide financial assistance to local school districts and nonprofit groups in the implementation of new programs to aid minority school children in overcoming educational disadvantages; to eliminate, prevent, or reduce minority group isolation; and to meet special needs as a result of the elimination of minority group segregation and discrimination.

The ESAA is administered by the Office of Education of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. In recognition of the valuable roles to be played by students and community members in achieving their communities' education and desegregation goals, provision is made under this new program for the establishment of community and student advisory committees (SAC's) to aid local school districts in effectively carrying out their funded projects.

How Is Committee Membership Selected?

Federal regulations established under the Emergency School Aid Act state:

(1) The local educational agency shall, not more than 15 days after approval of an application for assistance under the Act, or not more than 15 days after commencement of the first academic year for which such assistance is awarded, whichever is later, establish . . . a student advisory committee of secondary school students at each school which will be affected by any program, project, or activity assisted under the Act and which offers secondary instruction.

(2) Each such committee shall be composed of equal numbers of nonminority group secondary students and of such students from each minority group substantially represented in each such school. The members of each such committee shall be selected by the student body or the student government of such school. Each such committee shall have at least six members.

(3) The application of such agency shall contain an assurance that representatives of the agency will periodically consult with student advisory committees established pursuant to this paragraph concerning matters relevant to the program, project, or activity, and that copies of the Act and this regulation and the agency's approved project proposal will be supplied to all members of such committees.

(4) Not more than 30 days after the award of assistance under the Act (or after commencement of the first academic year for which such assistance is awarded, whichever is later), such agency shall afford the members of its student advisory committees (or at least one representative from each of such committees) an opportunity to select at least one nonminority group secondary student and an equal number of such students from each minority group substantially represented in the community, to serve as members of the district-wide advisory committee. . . .

(5) The names of the members of such committees, a statement of the purpose of such committees, and the names of additional members of the district-wide advisory committee selected pursuant to subparagraph (4) of this paragraph shall be published in a newspaper of general circulation or otherwise made public not more than 10 days after their selection. The names of the

members of committees formed pursuant to this paragraph and evidence of such publication shall be submitted to the Assistant Secretary not more than 20 days after the date required pursuant to subparagraph (4) of this paragraph for selection of such additional members.

The regulations do not dictate the exact formation and role of the committees, but are designed to ensure their immediate creation and to provide the means for a consistent student voice in all parts of the program. Their actual nature, function, and effectiveness depend upon the interest and commitment of local individuals—both students and adults.

There are three main considerations relating to the selection of committee membership: (1) the composition of the committee; (2) the process of selection; and (3) adequate publicity both before and after students are chosen.

The committee is to include equal representation of "nonminority group secondary students and of such students from each minority group substantially represented in each such school." For example, in a school which has both black and Spanish-speaking students substantially represented, the committee will be composed of equal numbers of black, Spanish-surnamed, and Caucasian students. In addition, students who have served on SAC's in the past feel strongly that the committees cannot be fully effective unless they include a true cross section of the entire student community, not only in terms of ethnic background but also in regard to academic levels and social relationships within those ethnic groups. The membership should include students from among a wide variety of informal student groups.

In calling for the selection of SAC members by the student body or the student government of each school, the regulations allow for flexibility in the selection method while assuring that it is fundamentally a *student* process. The typical schoolwide election, or election by homeroom, may not always serve the best purposes. Students should consult with the principal in developing the fairest procedures for nomination and selection, given the particular conditions in the individual school.

Possible approaches include: election by either student government or student body from a slate of self-nominated candidates; representation chosen by student government or the student body from diverse student organizations; election of representatives by the different ethnic groups; or selection by student government upon recommendation by students, faculty, and administration.

A key element in a good selection process is adequate publicity, both before and after the fact. Information concerning the student advisory

committee and the time and manner in which membership is to be selected should be published in all school newspapers and advertised well in advance by other effective means of communication; e.g., public address system, posters, bulletin board notices, or announcements in assemblies. Once the membership has been established, names should be publicized immediately, so that all students are aware of the committee's existence and its plans for convening. Good communication with the entire student body should be a continuous element in SAC activities.

What Is a Student Advisory Committee?

Your school SAC can be viewed as having a twofold purpose: (1) to serve as an advisor to school district officials on the implementation of the ESAA project; and (2) to develop activities in your individual school that will enable you to fulfill your advisory responsibilities effectively.

ESAA programs may undertake a wide variety of projects. These include teacher training, development of new curriculums and instructional methods, remedial education programs, hiring and training of teacher aids and counseling personnel, innovative interracial education programs, parent involvement, and community information projects.

As soon as you have been formed as a group, school district officials will meet with you and the members of other SAC's to describe your community's ESAA project, its various program components, and which of the proposed activities are to have an impact on your school. During that session, your committee will be given a copy of the approved local educational agency's (LEA's) project application, the Emergency School Aid Act, and the ESAA regulations so that you can familiarize yourselves further with the program as it affects your entire community.

Prior to development of its ESAA application, each LEA is required to form a districtwide advisory committee. This committee is to assist in the development and implementation of the ESAA project. The committee is composed of representatives from at least five civic or community organizations, of teachers, and of secondary school students. These secondary school students are selected by the adult members of the advisory committee before the committee begins its work on the preparation and review of the LEA's application.

Not more than 30 days after an LEA is awarded assistance, the members of the SAC's within the LEA are to select additional student members to the districtwide advisory committee. The number of stu-

dents to be added is determined by the LEA; *however, there must be at least one nonminority secondary school student and an equal number of such students from each minority group substantially represented in the community.* The selection process for these members of the districtwide advisory committee is to be determined by the members of the SAC's within each LEA. The persons chosen will join the students already seated on the districtwide advisory committee.

From that time on, you should meet at regular intervals with school officials to hear progress reports from them, and to present your perspectives and recommendations on the program and its impact on the school environment.

Your committee may develop ideas on how students could participate more directly in implementing portions of the project; e.g., roles they might play in a school-community relations component. To fulfill this kind of advisory capacity is not an easy task in any situation. You may not always feel that you have anything of great importance to say regarding some aspects of the program. Yet it is important that school officials keep you adequately informed about what is going on in the project and that you pass on information of interest to your student body. It is also important that you have an opportunity to present to those officials appropriate concerns and views of your fellow students. You as a committee should work with officials to develop your knowledge and skills in this capacity so that, should plans be made to apply for further program support next year or to request an amendment to the approved program, you will be able to participate knowledgeably in the design and development of the project application.

You should work with fellow students, the principal, and other school officials to define the specific role most important for you, given conditions within your school and the presence of other kinds of student groups. For example, the student committee could serve as a human relations group by sponsoring workshops, seminars, and other events to encourage greater appreciation of diverse cultures.

If you have been well selected as a group, you will represent a cross section of the secondary school student body. You therefore bring to the committee a diversity of experience, awareness, and resources, and share its commitment to work closely with other members of the school community to achieve the committee's goals. The definition of your role, and your specific goals and objectives as a committee, must arise not only from your own views and experiences, but also from active consultation with school officials and broad communication with all segments of the student body.

HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT IT?

The realization of a constructive committee role within the school begins with the development of sound working relationships with the principal and school administration. The principal is ultimately responsible for all activities within the school. He must be responsive not only to the needs and concerns of the students, but also of the faculty, the superintendent, the board of education, the parents, and the community at large. That the SAC develops as a positive, constructive group within the school is in the principal's best interests. An active, practical student organization is one of the best aids the principal can have in creating a harmonious and stimulating educational atmosphere. This does not mean that you are to become "his students" in attempting to solve the problems as they arise. It means rather that you must clearly understand and respect each other's position and responsibilities and create together what you consider to be a meaningful role for the SAC within the school. You will not always agree on plans and recommendations, but maintaining open and straightforward communication is essential. The principal is the authority to whom the advisory committee furnishes advice. He will not always be able to act upon all the advice he receives, because some of it is likely to be at odds from different quarters.

It is probable that at least one faculty member will be working with you in an advisory capacity. While decisions on courses of action and recommendations should be made by the committee, your faculty advisor is likely to have good suggestions on effective means for implementing your plans. His or her experience and expertise in some areas can be a valuable resource. If possible, or if the committee has a choice in mind, you might recommend a specific individual to the principal to serve as your advisor.

Students who have served on SAC's in the past point out that an important factor in achieving success as a committee is frequency and regularity of meetings. You will be meeting, from time to time, with district officials regarding the LEA project. In the interim, however, you should carry out your regular activities within the school context. As you initially define your role, you will want to meet on one or two occasions with the principal.

From then on, you may or may not wish to meet with him regularly. These meetings can take place as needed. But your meetings as a committee should be regular and fairly frequent if you intend to accomplish something of benefit to the school. How frequent is up to you, but regularity is essential to aid members and subcommittees in carrying out special tasks quickly and to help you move forward as a group. A committee which meets only when there is a crisis cannot be effective.

Organization is another issue to be dealt with immediately upon formation of the SAC. The first meeting should include election of officers, the establishment of a structure, and the formulation of rules and regulations for the operation of the committee. At this time, you should also decide on the date, time, and place of your regular meetings, and copies of this SAC handbook should be distributed to all members. Appointment of subcommittees or task forces will be appropriate once you have established some specific directions for yourselves. Minutes should be kept on all sessions, and these records may be a good way to keep the principal informed of your concerns and activities.

Previous committees have used a variety of means for communicating with the student body aside from informal discussions. Some resources that you might consider include:

(1) Suggestion or grievance boxes.
(2) Workshops or assemblies.
(3) The school newspaper.
(4) Bulletin boards.
(5) The public address system.

You should talk with school officials to arrange for appropriate ground rules for committee use of mimeograph machines, the public address system, school supplies, and the like. Keeping students fully informed and listening carefully to their concerns are important steps toward preventing many problems, overcoming student apathy, and developing effective constituencies for participation in worthwhile projects and endeavors.

Once you have been established as a committee and have elected officers, met with LEA officials on the ESAA project, had discussions with your principal, and have publicized your existence among fellow students, you are ready to begin outlining specific objectives for your SAC. The context to consider includes the overall goals of the ESAA program, the aims and nature of your LEA's project, and the special problems and needs of your school. One key to more effective action is to base your objectives on the real needs of your fellow students.

As a broadly representative group, you are likely to come up with a list of objectives reflecting differing concerns of the student population. You will then have to establish priorities among your objectives, consider the needs of all groups, and begin to determine the activities you will have to undertake to accomplish the first task on your list. It may be wise to attempt one of your easier objectives first, to give you experience in working together as a committee and to gain a suc-

cess that will encourage your fellow students to support you and participate more actively themselves.

For any particular objective, there may be numerous approaches you might take to achieve it. Your approach might involve one or a series of activities, but each one should be carefully thought out as to purpose, means, the capacity and resources of the SAC to carry out the activity, and the expected results. You should consider which other groups or school officials should be directly involved, when, and how. *How* you go about achieving your goals is usually as important as what you accomplish.

SUGGESTED SAC ACTIVITIES

As you design the projects you wish to undertake, you should consult with your principal and the LEA project director. All activities undertaken must, of course, complement the LEA's objectives as outlined in their funded proposal. In addition, all activities would require close consultation with appropriate school officials.

Depending upon the objectives you set for your committee, there is a wide range of potential activities you could either advise on or initiate yourselves. Some suggestions and examples of activities which have proved helpful in the past in assuring a successful desegregation project are:

(1) Surveys of research on student attitudes, issues, needs or problems with the aim of developing an objective analysis of current concerns and/or possible courses of action or remedies. Well-designed questionnaires, surveys, and evaluation instruments are excellent tools to document and support recommendations, highlight needs, and establish direction for new efforts. Faculty members would be particularly helpful in this kind of project. You should bear in mind that a survey or poll is a research tool, not a ballot or a vote on an issue that is not "votable." The board of education is the local legislative body, and your role is that of a resource to its deliberations and policy development.

(2) Student-faculty grievance committee, which could be composed of equal numbers of students recommended by the SAC and teachers chosen by the faculty or principal. One or more grievance boxes could be conveniently placed in the school to enable everyone to participate. The Committee would discuss and/or hear grievances on desegregation problems and make recommendations to the principal.

(3) Hearing board. A properly formed SAC, with representation from different groups within the school, might develop as a hearing board to resolve conflicts or deal with improper activities resulting from the desegregation process. Thorough research would have to be undertaken in regard to school rules and regulations, student rights, lines of authority and responsibility within the school, and so forth. The SAC would have to work closely with school officials in developing this kind of role, again recognizing the legal authority of the board of education.

(4) Student-to-student programs. One example is a student tutoring project in which high school students assist peers or younger pupils in the school system. Arrangements can often be made to utilize available school classrooms both during and after school hours.

(5) Aid in the selection of textbooks and other classroom materials. Most schools have a committee with responsibility for selecting educational materials. Students could participate in selecting films, new books, and instructional materials which they feel are of particular value.

(6) Minicourses. Courses developed and taught by students and designed to share experiences, lifestyles, and cultural values with faculty, students, and parents.

(7) Seminars and workshops, involving students, school staff, and/or parents to focus on particular problems or to share ideas and exchange information on school and community situations.

(8) Student-administrator discussion groups. This type of activity, if based on mutual respect for both groups, can be an excellent means of "opening up" school, and allowing students and administrators to share views, concerns, future plans, and problems.

(9) Examination of extracurricular programs, such as clubs, athletics, and student publications, with the aim of working with school authorities to make those programs more relevant to student needs.

(10) Sponsorship of forums, conferences, or expanded assemblies with outside speakers to involve students and community leaders in a discussion of existing community attitudes and problems.

(11) Information center. In order for a student body to participate intelligently in different areas of endeavor, it should be well-informed. The gathering and dissemination of resource materials, publications, films, and similar material on issues and

activities of interest to students will facilitate the participation process. The center could include sections relating to the experiences and concerns of various cultural groups, with each group responsible for designing, stocking, and servicing its own area, and for developing displays to stimulate the interest of other students.

(12) Joint activities with other SAC's. You may wish to get together with SAC's from other schools in your district, or even other districts in your State, to share ideas and experiences and plan joint functions. Such efforts should be worked out through consultation with the principal and superintendent's office. Some States have held conferences with representatives from SAC's and school administrators.

WHAT ARE THE RESOURCES?

While innumerable studies have been undertaken in recent years regarding the desegregation experience, very little is available in written form which might be helpful to you on the activities of students in desegregating schools. The information that is available focuses upon the attitudes and reactions of students to their changing circumstances, and you already have the best resources in that regard in yourselves and your fellow students. Rap sessions among your schoolmates may be a good place to start in finding out how others are responding to the experience and dispelling misunderstandings about each other.

If you as a committee are also interested in keeping up on the progress of desegregation in other communities across the country, you might wish to become familiar with *Integrated Education: Race and Schools*, which is a bimonthly magazine that covers national and local developments in desegregation, successes and difficulties in school systems, changes in approaches to the education of black, Spanish-surnamed, and Indian children, and includes a bibliography of current literature on education and desegregation. Many school systems and school libraries subscribe to the magazine.

Principally, you must rely upon yourselves and your own community resources to aid you in designing and carrying out your activities. In some instances, you may feel the need for additional support, particularly if you want to get together with other student committees or districts to share experiences and learn from one another. Technical assistance may be available from either your State department of education or from general assistance centers. The Office of Education funds technical assistance teams in 44 State departments of education and 26 universities to aid school systems in developing and carrying out their desegregation programs. In some school districts, these teams have

worked directly with administrators and student committees. If you feel a specific need for this kind of assistance, work through your local school officials to see if your State has such a team or if one of the funded universities is located in your State, and whether either would be able to provide the kind of aid you need.

In addition, the regional offices of the Office of Education have program officers who work directly with the funded school districts. The regional program officer assigned to your area will arrange to meet with your committee when he is visiting your district to discuss your activities. He should be able to share with you what some other SAC's are doing in your State and region.

As you plan your program be sure to investigate the resources—both human and other—in your school and community. Find out what organizations exist and what individuals have experience and talent to help you in your efforts. Do not hesitate to go to faculty members, school officials, and your parents to solicit support. The desegregation process affects everyone in the community, and everyone should be working together to maximize the benefits to be received from an improved educational system. Do not minimize the role you can play—this could be the best educational experience of your lives.

APPENDIX A

REGIONAL PERSONNEL, EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS (EEOP)

REGION I
Mr. William T. Logan, Jr.
Regional Commissioner
Mr. Theodore Parker
Senior Program Officer/EEOP
Office of Education/DHEW
J.F. Kennedy Federal Bldg.
Boston, Mass. 02203
(617) 223-4010

REGION II
Mr. Robert H. Seitzer
Regional Commissioner
Mr. Jack Simms
Senior Program Officer/EEOP
Office of Education/DHEW
Federal Bldg.
26 Federal Plaza
New York, N.Y. 10007
(212) 264-4420

REGION III
Dr. Walker F. Agnew
Regional Commissioner
Mr. Gerald Weinstein
Senior Program Officer/EEOP
Office of Education/DHEW
3535 Market Street
Philadelphia, Pa.
(215) 596-1043

REGION IV
Dr. Cecil Yarborough
Regional Commissioner
Mr. Henry Kemp
Senior Program Officer/EEOP
Office of Education/DHEW
50 Seventh St., N.E. Room 550
Atlanta, Ga. 30323
(404) 526-3076

REGION V
Ms. Mary Jane Calais
Regional Commissioner
Mr. Louis Irons
Senior Program Officer/EEOP
Office of Education/DHEW
300 South Wacker Dr.
Chicago, Ill. 60606
(312) 353-7200

REGION VI
Mr. Edward Baca
Regional Commissioner
Mr. Thomas Kendrick
Senior Program Officer/EEOP
Office of Education/DHEW
1114 Commerce St.
Dallas, Tex. 75202
(214) 749-3084

REGION VII
Dr. Phillip W. Hefley
Regional Commissioner
Mr. Robert Farning
Senior Program Officer/EEOP
Office of Education/DHEW
601 East 12th St.
Kansas City, Mo. 64106
(816) 374-5041

REGION VIII
Dr. Leon P. Minear
Regional Commissioner
Mr. Albert Macias
Senior Program Officer/EEOP
Office of Education/DHEW
1961 Stout St.
Denver, Colo. 80202
(303) 837-4844

REGION IX
Mr. Edward Aguirre
Regional Commissioner
Mr. John P. Conley
Senior Program Officer/EEOP
Office of Education/DHEW
50 Fulton St.
San Francisco, Calif. 94102
(415) 556-7750

REGION X
Mr. W. Phillips Rockefeller
Acting Regional Commissioner
Mr. Peter A. Suazo
Senior Program Officer/EEOP
Office of Education/DHEW
Arcade Bldg., 1319 Second Ave.
Seattle, Wash. 98101
(206) 442-0450